

VZCZCXRO7717  
PP RUEHCHI RUEHDT RUEHHM  
DE RUEHPF #1802 2761005  
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FM AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7410  
INFO RUEHZS/ASEAN COLLECTIVE  
RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI  
RUEHBK/AMEMBASSY BANGKOK 1836

UNCLAS PHNOM PENH 001802

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FOR G/TIP, EAP/MLS and EAP/RSP, DS/IP/EAP, DS/ICI/CIL, BANGKOK FOR  
ICE

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [KWMN](#) [CB](#) [ASEC](#)

SUBJECT: RSO/ICE/NGO MEETINGS ON COMBATTING CRIMES AGAINST  
CHILDREN.

¶1. Summary. On September 26, the Regional Security Office (RSO) and the Immigration and Custom Enforcement (ICE) Bangkok Attachs of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) organized a meeting with NGOs to discuss the challenges facing NGOs in combating sex crimes against children. The RSO encouraged the NGOs to inform the Mission of any leads they may have on crimes committed by American citizens against children. ICE officers briefed participants of ICE responsibilities, their challenges, and expectations. End Summary.

#### Mission Seeks Greater NGO Cooperation

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¶2. In coordination with Bangkok/ICE, the RSO organized and sponsored a meeting with twenty representatives from nine different NGOs to discuss our common goal of fighting sexual abuse of children in Cambodia. RSO John Davis opened the meeting by thanking the NGOs for their attendance. He said that child sexual abuse is an issue that touches both the NGO community and the Embassy, and encouraged the NGOs to work with the Mission and DHS ICE.

¶3. Ann Hurst, ICE Attach based in Bangkok, briefed participants about DHS ICE, the PROTECT Act and the challenges in conducting investigations of sex crimes against children. She said that ICE would like to set up an ICE office in Cambodia in the future, but funding constraints currently preclude this. Hurst underscored the strong Bangkok-Phnom Penh cooperation, without which ICE would not have been as successful in their work to date.

¶4. Hurst also touched on the challenges that confront both the NGOs and the Mission, including government corruption and weakness in the implementation of Cambodian laws. She also encouraged the NGOs to consider the issue of child pornography in their future programs to combat child sexual exploitation. Hurst mentioned that the perpetrators of these crimes are turning to the Internet as another avenue of access to underage children. She also stated the perpetrators will typically document their activity through photographs or video, and use the internet to distribute the material. While arresting perpetrators is desirable, ICE added that the ultimate goal is to have a successful prosecution against those perpetrators. Therefore, evidence is very important and ICE encouraged the NGOs to work with the police to secure physical evidence during the arrest for eventual handover to ICE agents.

¶5. Hurst commented on the excellent cooperation ICE and the Mission have received from the Cambodian government involving Protect Act cases. While not denying that the RGC has much to do to improve the government's capacity to handle such crimes, she said that RGC cooperation has been indispensable for successful operations. She noted that there are good individuals within the RGC who are committed and willing to make the changes; more training and support is needed from donors.

NGOs: Security Issues Paramount

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¶6. The NGOs expressed concern over security issues -- for the victims as well as for NGO staff. Action Pour Les Enfants asked whether there exist any mechanisms to ensure the safety of their staff related to the investigation. World Vision was concerned with traumatizing child victims of sexual abuse during the legal process by having them repeat their ordeals and facing the perpetrators who abused them. Overall, victim and witness protection has been the main challenge for the NGO workers.

¶7. Comment: While the Embassy and Bangkok/ICE office have developed good relations with individual NGOs working on sexual abuse of children, this meeting was the first attempt to better coordinate efforts among all the NGOs as well as USG officials. The NGOs appreciated the information they received, especially the guidance as to what to do and who to contact for intervention in the course of their own work. End Comment.

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